Chesapeake Bay Regional Section

Introduction

As a supplement to the Virginia State Tourism Plan, this section is dedicated to the Chesapeake Bay region. ***It is strongly suggested that the Virginia State Tourism Plan be read in conjunction with this regional section.***

The key elements of this regional section include the following:

- A situational analysis of tourism in the region, which highlights the key tourism products, regional strengths and challenges, competitive considerations, and other relevant information, is presented to set the framework for the regional strategy.

- Key product themes of focus are identified and applicable objectives and strategies are presented for the five plan outcomes of Products, Pillars (infrastructure), Partnerships, Promotions, and Policies for the Chesapeake Bay tourism strategy.

- Action steps specific to the region, which are above and beyond the actions of the state level plan are outlined.

- Stakeholders proposed to be involved in implementing the plan are also identified.

- Key takeaways for the Chesapeake Bay's tourism development in the next five years are outlined.

Process for Findings

Numerous factors formed the basis of Chesapeake Bay's tourism strategy, including the tourism industry's own vision for the region, an inventory and analysis of the tourism assets currently offered, input and analysis of visitor information, and an analysis of the competitive environment. These four key areas are further described below:

Industry Vision: The industry vision served as the foundation for the region's strategy, based on input from approximately 1,300 responses statewide, including stakeholders from the Chesapeake Bay through workshops, surveys, and discussions. The primary desire of Chesapeake Bay stakeholders is to utilize the region's natural assets and further develop outdoor recreation and build upon the region's rich history and heritage in an authentic manner to increase tourism.

 Tourism Assets: The Chesapeake Bay's tourism assets were analyzed by the study team. This included the current mix of tourism products such as attractions, visitor activities, hotel inventory, natural assets and topography, industry base, and socio-cultural character. The strengths and challenges of the region's current characteristics such as infrastructure, road/air accessibility, partnerships, policies, and promotions were also

discussed with numerous key stakeholders and assessed. In addition to the study team's personal experience of the Chesapeake Bay, other input contributed to an understanding of the existing tourism assets, including input from tourism stakeholders, VTC databases, local tourism marketing information/promotional information from organizations such as the Northern Neck Tourism Commission, DMOs, town/county tourism sites, chambers of commerce, tourism industry associations, tourism industry resources, PwC resources, and others.

Consumer Perspective: Research was analyzed on a global, national, state, and regional level. This research included visitor trends, activities, perceptions/preferences, performance indications, and emerging elements. Macro trends impacting tourism such as population and demographic trends, GDP/GSP, unemployment rates, consumer prices, personal consumption spending, gas prices, and other factors impacting tourism in a broad sense were also analyzed.

Sources of research related to Virginia and Chesapeake Bay compiled by the VTC were analyzed, which included profiles of past visitors (by traveler type, geography, season, and activity), traveler attitude studies, and other data. Profiles of past visitors (statewide) showed activities engaged in which are offered in the Chesapeake Bay, seasonality, party size, spending, demographics, income levels, travel distance and patterns, duration of trip, travel party origin, and other relevant information. Attitude studies of past and prospective travelers provided additional insight for the Chesapeake Bay in terms of appeal, perceptions of tourism products, activities, and destination attributes as well as other relevant hub and spoke travel behavior and activities engaged in by past and prospective visitors to Virginia.

Visitor insights show that the region is highly rated for being relaxing/scenic, good for families, its overall atmosphere, and outdoor recreation. The region was also recognized by most for excellent fishing, being great for scenic drives, warm/sunny beaches, and great for boating/sailing. Activities such as exploring nature/hiking, paddle sports, biking, and camping are offered in the region, yet were not as prominent in visitors' minds. The region was rated relatively high among visitors for food and dining, and more than half recognize the region for unique local/ethnic cooking. Overall, visitor insights show that the Chesapeake Bay region has a strong favorability rating among past and prospective travelers, including appeal to higher income earners.

Additional state/regional sources included data on visitor spending patterns based on economic impact data in the region, state parks attendance, welcome center statistics, Northern Neck Tourism Plan, Colonial Beach Comprehensive Plan, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, and the Virginia Shellfish Aquaculture Situation and Outlook Report and other sources. Examples of national and international sources include data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization, U.S. Travel Association, Office of Travel & Tourism Industries (OTTI), MMGY Global, Outdoor Industry Association, U.S. Culture and Heritage Travel Council, National Trust for Historic Preservation, World Food Travel Association, National Parks Service, Smith Travel Research (STR), America's Byways, Woods & Poole, other U.S. government sources, travel industry publications and articles, and other relevant sources.

Competitive Perspective: To understand the offering and competitive positioning of Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay region, research and analysis was conducted which evaluated destinations, product offerings, market segments, and key strengths of competition on a regional basis and analysis of products, tourism spending, product rankings, and best practices and trends in tourism product areas on a statewide/national basis. For the Chesapeake Bay, the coastal areas of Maryland, North Carolina, and Delaware were analyzed. These states, in a number of ways, offer similarities in relaxing experiences such as outdoor recreation, coastal towns with arts and culture, beaches, water-oriented heritage, colonial history, and others. These other destinations have a mixture of natural and commercial coastal features as well as greater beach presence. The Chesapeake Bay region's experiences may have the appeal of being less developed in some areas, but it faces less name recognition and aggressive destination promotions.

Sources of this competitive information included, but were not limited to, review of tourism marketing websites/promotional information, tourism marketing and strategic plans, tourism organization annual reports, tourism industry publications and articles, rankings, available consumer-oriented research (statewide) which addresses competition, and tourism companies (outfitters, tour guides, etc.).

Tourism Situation

The Chesapeake Bay region is an area of largely unspoiled natural beauty and rich history situated on the north eastern coast of Virginia along the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. The Rappahannock River also runs through the middle of the area, segmenting the region into the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.

With 170,000 residents, the region remains one of the least populous regions of the state. Its most populous counties include Gloucester (37,000), King George (23,500), and Westmoreland (17,500). With limited population, the region remains economically challenged.

The Chesapeake Bay region is a developing tourism region. It accounted for approximately $428 million in travel and tourism expenditures in 2011 (approximately two percent of the state's overall travel and tourism expenditures), which is an increase of 4.0 percent since 2007. While growing, this region lags behind the state's eight percent growth.

In addition to tourism marketing at the destination level, the Northern Neck Tourism Commission serves as a regional organization focused on the northern part of the region; however, there is not a region-wide organization to promote both the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. There is greater opportunity for collaboration between Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula tourism industry stakeholders.

Nature and outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Bay and its rivers are visitor strengths for the region, offering scenic getaways. Notable outdoor assets include the Beaverdam Park, Chesapeake Bay, Potomac River, Rappahannock River, Belle Isle State Park, Caledon Natural Area, Westmoreland State Park, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, and the Captain John Smith Trail. These assets and trails offer visitors the opportunity to hike, bike, observe wildlife, fish, kayak, and canoe.

Visitor insights show that the region is highly rated for being relaxing/scenic, good
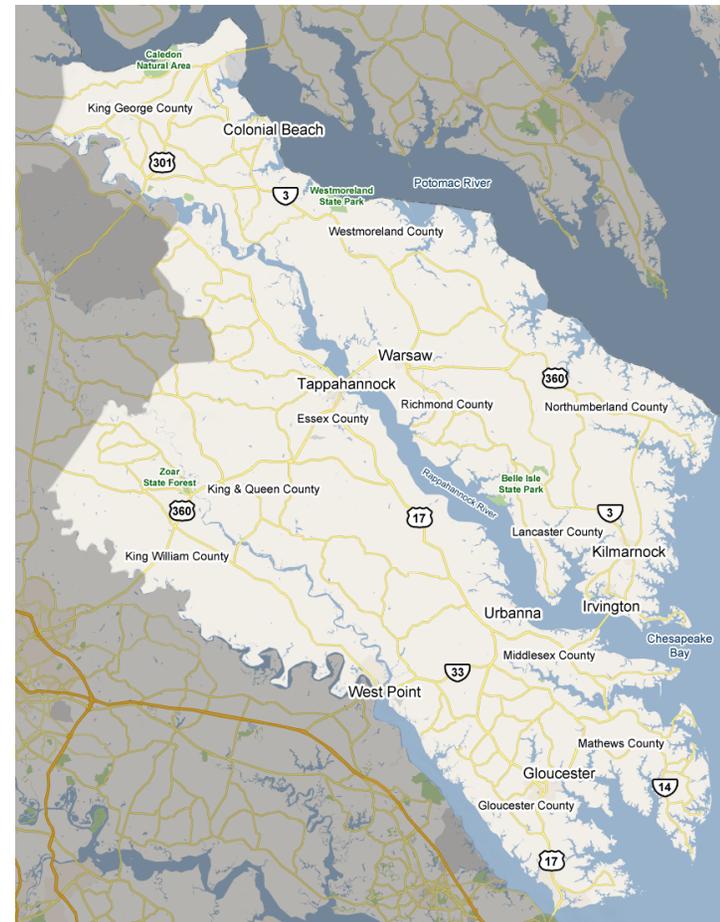
Regional Facts:

- Region Population: 170,000
- Largest County: 37,000
- Bodies of Water: Potomac River, Chesapeake Bay, Rappahannock River and York River
- 2011 Tourism Expenditures: $428 million
- 2007-11 Expenditure Growth: 4.0%

for families, its overall atmosphere, and outdoor recreation. The region was also recognized by most for excellent fishing, being great for scenic drives, warm/sunny beaches, and great for boating/sailing. Activities such as exploring nature/hiking, paddle sports, biking, and camping are offered in the region, yet are not as prominent in visitors' minds. The region was rated relatively high among visitors for food and dining, and more than half recognize the region for unique local/ethnic cooking. However, more restaurants and entertainment were cited as areas to improve destination appeal. Overall, visitor insights show that the Chesapeake Bay region has a strong favorability rating among past and prospective travelers, including appeal to higher income earners. Despite the region's rich history, it is not necessarily top of mind among visitors' perceptions; however, majority of visitors to Virginia are likely to visit a historical site on a future vacation.

While there are a number of water-oriented natural assets, public water access seems to be underserved, limiting the areas in which visitors can participate in outdoor recreation opportunities. Furthermore, outfitters and eco-oriented lodging, such as cabins and camping, appear to be underserved for the region in comparison to other areas of the state – even though, the Bethpage Camp Resort is nationally recognized and offers over 2,000 campsites. While the Tides Inn offers a distinctive upscale resort experience on the waterfront with a range of outdoor activities, and the Hope & Glory Inn has been ranked among the top coastal inns in the U.S., the region appears underserved in terms of hotel accommodations (only one percent of the state's hotel supply according to STR). In addition, the region's economy and mid-scale chains entirely comprise the chain properties (excluding independent hotels), indicating the lack of upscale (and higher-rated) chain properties, which are typically full-service hotels.

Highlights of Regional Lures/Strengths:

- Scenic beauty and Outdoor Recreation opportunities
- Natural Assets: Browne State Forest, Chilton Woods State Forest, Dragon Run State Forest, Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Sandy Point State Forest, Zoar State Forest
- Notable Cities & Towns: Colonial Beach, Irvington, Kilmarnock, Urbanna, Tappahannock
- State Parks: 3
- Presidential and Colonial history
- Proximity to Washington D.C.
- Aquaculture

Regional Challenges:

- Limited regional attraction anchors
- Limited recognition of assets and towns
- Lack of tourism industry maturity
- Differentiation from competition in nearby states - coastline and outdoors
- Limited outdoor and traditional accommodations
- Limited water access
- Limited accessibility - interstate and air
- Challenged economic base
- Limited regional cooperation
- Coastal seasonality

The region offers a number of notable coastal towns, including Colonial Beach, Irvington, Kilmarnock, and Urbanna and has an emerging arts and culinary scene, including its wineries, agri-tourism, and aqua-tourism opportunities. The region's coastal location combined with its watermen culture position it to leverage aqua farms to enhance its culinary profile for seafood. Culinary experiences, particularly as it relates to aquaculture, have the potential to unite the region through events such as the annual oyster festival in Urbanna, which attracts nearly 75,000 visitors, and companies such as Rappahannock River Oysters, which has brought national attention to the oysters in the region. The company harvests oysters

in the Rappahannock River and has since opened a tasting room in Topping, Virginia, called Merroir. Since 2005, the number of oysters planted by Virginia aqua-culturists has grown from 6.2 million to 65.5 million in 2011.

The region's deep roots in American History help to distinguish it from other destinations. The Chesapeake Bay is the birthplace of Chief Powhatan, three presidents, including George Washington, two signers of the Declaration of Independence, Governor John Page, and the Civil War general, Robert E. Lee. Visitors can experience the history at George Washington's birthplace, Stratford Hall, and Menokin, amongst others. The region also features history of Virginia Indians with the lands of the Pamunkey and Mattaponi tribes. With these natural and historical assets, the Northern Neck region is currently seeking a National Heritage Area designation.

Other coastal areas of Maryland, North Carolina, and Delaware offer similar relaxing experiences such as outdoor recreation, coastal towns with arts and culture, beaches, water-oriented heritage, colonial history, and others. These other destinations have a mixture of natural and commercial coastal features as well as greater beach presence. The Chesapeake Bay region's experiences may have the appeal of being less developed in some areas, but it faces less name recognition and aggressive destination promotions. Aqua-tourism is a potential differentiating product for the region particularly when combined with other culinary features, such as wine and dining. However, Maryland may serve as strong competition with recent efforts to build the aqua-tourism industry and its well-known recognition for the blue crab.

A challenge for the region is its lack of major anchor attractions positioned and marketed to visitors and brand recognition enjoyed by more prominent attractions in the state. The region faces some accessibility limitations without the benefit of major interstate access running throughout the region or a commercial airport. There are, however, general aviation airports. Its proximity to Washington D.C. offers a scenic coastal getaway, as well as the opportunity to draw visitors from Central Virginia and Hampton Roads. In addition, like many other coastal destinations, it faces a seasonality challenge.

Chesapeake Bay Strategy

Product Focus Areas

Based upon research and analysis efforts described and in consideration of the tourism situation, the following are identified as the primary and secondary areas of product focus for the Chesapeake Bay. The key definitions below describe these areas, which form the basis of the product objectives.

- Primary theme focus: Nature & Outdoor Recreation, History & Heritage, Town/City Centers, Culinary (Agri-tourism/Aqua-tourism, Wineries), Events

- Secondary theme focus: Arts & Music, Commercial Attractions (Higher-end)

Those product themes identified as "primary" can generally be characterized as existing or growing product areas that within the next five years should be further developed or enhanced in an effort to serve as (or support) primary draws for the area. Those categorized as "secondary" are areas that in the next five years may realistically need a longer time horizon to develop into a primary draw for the region. Secondary may also indicate areas that may be more niche focused, or those that are generally complementary/auxiliary product experiences to the primary draws in the next five years.

Key Definitions

Nature & Outdoor Recreation - Relaxing and active experiences to enjoy Virginia's scenic natural environment and outdoors, including but not limited to driving tours, hiking, biking, paddling, boating, fishing, hunting, observing wildlife, and others. Beach experiences are also included.

History & Heritage - Experiences, structures, and sites that show Virginia and U.S. history and heritage

Town/City Centers - Refers to the central area of a destination, generally a downtown or main street area

Culinary - Includes wineries, breweries, distilleries, foodie/dining, and agri/aqua-tourism

Events - May include festivals, fairs, concerts, performances, tournaments/races (running, biking, swimming, kayaking, rowing, boating/sailing, fishing, etc.), and other events. These events serve to further enhance other product themes.

Arts & Music - Visual, performance, and craft arts experiences and music of various genres and musical heritage

Commercial Attractions - Refers to tourism attractions designed for user entertainment and enjoyment and may not necessarily rely heavily upon inherent destination features. For Chesapeake Bay, this specifically refers to the higher-end/luxury attractions. Higher-end/luxury attractions may include spas, resorts, golf courses, and other experiences with upscale elements targeted to an affluent market.

In addition, it should be noted that **cultural heritage** refers to the cultural and social characteristics of a region that are fundamental to evaluating a tourism destination. Culture consists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. From a tourism perspective, visitors want to experience the local culture of a destination. This includes many components, such as art and music of the region, history, local crafts, traditions, style and types of local food, architecture, religion, and distinctive leisure activities. These are what make the cultural heritage of Virginia "authentic." By its very nature, culture is interpreted by visitors in many ways. Each region will have the opportunity to further define the regional "cultural" lures, based on information in this plan.

Objectives and Strategies

Applicable objectives and strategies are presented for the five plan outcomes of Products, Pillars (infrastructure), Partnerships, Promotions, and Policies. Following the objectives and strategies are additional action steps specific to the region which are above and beyond the actions of the state level plan. Additional action steps should be read in conjunction with action steps of the state level plan.

Strategies in the plan are assigned a priority/timing as high or immediate action (denoted by red) and medium or mid-term action over the next five years (denoted by blue). The categorization of high or medium is both a function of priority and timing for the region. Those categorized as "high'" can generally be characterized as existing or growing product areas that within the next five years should be further developed or enhanced in an effort to serve as (or support) primary draws. Those categorized as "medium" are areas that within the next five years may realistically need a longer time horizon to develop into a primary draw, those that may be more niche areas, or those that are generally complementary/auxiliary product experiences to the primary draws in the next five years.

Products

Nature & Outdoor Recreation

Nature & Outdoor Recreation Objective: Visitor experiences are further developed which highlight Virginia's natural beauty and natural assets			
Strategy	*Priority/Timing*	*Strategy*	*Priority/Timing*
Develop, maintain, and expand outdoor trails and water trails	●	Seek and maintain designations for National Scenic Byways and the Virginia Scenic Byways and Scenic Drives	●
Continue to develop and enhance outdoor experiences at parks, forests, recreation areas, nature areas, and preserves	●	Develop and enhance accommodations related to outdoor experiences	●

Leverage Virginia's waterfront areas	🔴		

Additional Regional Actions:

- Develop and enhance trails and water trails for distinctive outdoor experiences
- Ensure water accessibility at park areas and along coastlines for boats, canoes, kayaks, fishing piers, etc.
- Continue educational and experiential features for coastal wildlife and aquaculture
- Leverage waterfront areas in the region along the Potomac River, Rappahannock River, Chesapeake Bay, and other water areas for nature and recreation, including boardwalks, piers, and

lighthouses along coastal areas as well as commercial opportunities, which may include restaurants and accommodations
- Ensure water accessibility for recreation as well as information visibility regarding coastlines. Tie in other visitors themes, including wine and arts with coastal experiences.
- Explore the development of additional outdoor related accommodations near the water, which may include eco-oriented resorts as well as cottages and camping opportunities

Products (continued)

History & Heritage

History & Heritage Objective: History and heritage experiences are preserved, refreshed, and expanded			
Strategy	*Priority/Timing*	*Strategy*	*Priority/Timing*
Refresh history and heritage visitor experiences	🔴	Continue to connect history experiences	🔴
Invest in historic structures, sites, and attractions	🔴	Enhance historical experiences through accommodations	🔴

Additional Regional Actions:

- Ensure experiential and interactive elements are available at historic homes and attractions in the region, including Stratford Hall, George Washington's birth place, and Native American lands
- Complete the designation of the Northern Neck as a National Heritage Area
- Continue to showcase the region's history and heritage through events and festivals as well as personifying the culture of the region through aquaculture (e.g. oysters), arts, watermen's heritage tours, and other means

- Continue to enhance historic trails, including water trails to connect historic experiences. The Chesapeake Bay region has the opportunity to tie in a variety of historic experiences through presidential, Civil War, and Native American heritage and tie in outdoor experiences.
- Utilize the historic character, including presidential and maritime history of the region and explore the development of additional historic accommodations such as hotels and bed & breakfasts

Products (continued)

Towns/City Centers

Town/City Centers Objective: Visitor experiences in town/city centers are improved to create attractive destinations			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Develop and enhance outdoor experiences in the town or city center	🔴	Take steps to align with standards of the Virginia Main Street Program and National Main Street Program	🟣
Enhance town/city center areas through development of the arts	🔴	Encourage the development of enterprises that enhance and balance the town/city center's current offerings and increase vibrancy	🔴
Establish and uphold guidelines for town/city center enhancement and redevelopment	🔴	Develop transportation that allows for enhanced connectivity within and to the town/city center	🟣

Additional Regional Actions:

- Leverage coast-oriented nature and recreation opportunities prevalent in the area and tie in these opportunities to the town/city center area. This may include various water-related features in the downtown area such as fish, crab, and oysters on display, remote control boat activities for kids, a simulated paddling feature, or play areas for kids that include historic boat replicas. This may also include outfitter locations in the downtown area where activity/equipment is visible to visitors and shuttle service from town to outdoor areas for one-way biking or paddling trips is available.
- Ensure works of regional artists are displayed, including those that showcase the historical and maritime character of the area.

Include other visitor themes such as the outdoors which may feature sculptures or other mediums related to fishing, wildlife, and other iconic representations of the region.
- Seek to align with the guidelines and goals of main street designations which can help to achieve mobilization, redevelopment and economic development efforts to town areas
- Explore the development of business offerings to further support visitors, which may include the development of hotel supply to balance offerings in destinations, unique dining, and retail
- Explore the development of shuttle services to coastal areas and trolley services

Culinary

Culinary Objective: Culinary visitor experiences (wineries, agri-tourism, dining, etc.) are established and expanded			
Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Expand wine tourism experiences	🟣	Build reputation as a destination for dining and continue to develop unique restaurant experiences	🟣
Develop and enhance visitor experiences related to Virginia's agriculture and aquaculture products	🔴	Develop and expand trails to enhance culinary experiences	🟣

Additional Regional Actions:

- Continue to enhance winery experiences in the region and leverage the prominent Ingleside vineyard. Tie in aquaculture of the region with wine and oyster tastings.
- Continue to enhance agri-tourism experiences and aqua-tourism experiences with experiential, kid-friendly, and educational features. With Chesapeake's vast coastline, the region has the opportunity to further develop aqua-tourism experiences with aquaculture businesses developing experiences for visitors including guides, product tastings, and educational/science opportunities, etc.

- Enhance wine, agriculture, and aquaculture to build and enhance culinary experiences in the region, particularly as it relates to seafood
- Develop trails which tie in history, agriculture, aquaculture, and wine. An example may be an oyster and wine trail.
- Continue to use events and festivals as a platform to enhance the culinary profile of the region, tying in heritage, arts, music, and other visitor themes

Products (continued)

Events

Events Objective: Events which leverage Virginia's tourism assets are created and expanded	
Strategy	*Priority/Timing*
Enhance and develop events which promote the key visitor themes	🔴

Additional Regional Actions:

- Develop and enhance signature events for the region. These signature events should build upon, promote, and reinforce key visitor themes and showcase the authenticity and character for the region. Examples may include outdoor-related events such as marathons, races, boating events, and other outdoor competitions, culinary events that feature aquaculture and seafood of the region, unique events built around historic commemoration, arts events, and other events that highlight the watermen cultural heritage of the region, and others.
- Tie in multiple visitor themes in events, where appropriate, which may include coastal event locations, local agriculture, wine, oysters, crab, local artists, and others
- Use events to extend visitor seasons and attract visitor seasons during the traditional off-season

Products (continued)

Arts & Music Objective: Visitor experiences related to music and arts (performance, visual, craft, etc.) are created and enriched			
Strategy	*Priority/Timing*	*Strategy*	*Priority/Timing*
Enhance and develop music and art trails	🟣	Develop and enhance concentrated arts experiences	🟣
Add art to public spaces	🔴		

Additional Regional Actions:

- Ensure works of regional artists are displayed, including those that showcase the historical and maritime character of the area. Include other visitor themes such as the outdoors which may feature sculptures or other mediums related to fishing, wildlife, and iconic representations of the region.

- Develop arts & cultural districts and explore the development of other concentrated arts experiences such as an art commune that may be in a picturesque location where visitors can see artists work, purchase art, and participate in classes and activities, etc.
- Enhance arts in the region through events and festivals

Commercial Attractions Objective: Commercial attractions are increased	
Strategy	*Priority/Timing*
Explore the development of commercial attractions designed for a higher-end, luxury market	🟣

Additional Regional Actions:

- Explore the development or enhancement of higher-end attractions along the waterfront, similar to the Tides Inn. New development should consider the inclusion of meeting space. The feasibility of such developments would need to be carefully studied.

Pillars

Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Transportation Objective: Strategies to improve transportation are developed and executed			
Initiate concerted strategy to improve road transportation for tourism	● (purple)		
Wayfinding Objective: Visitor wayfinding is improved			
Ensure signage and visitor information is visible and available through multiple points	● (red)	Invest in technology infrastructure (Wi-Fi, cell reception, GPS, etc.)	● (purple)
Reinforce community sense of place	● (purple)		
Education & Training Objective: Tourism education and training programs are continued and enhanced			
Enhance training and education of tourism workforce	● (red)	Ensure tourism education programs are continued for students	● (purple)
Research Objective: Tourism research is available which supports tourism development and marketing initiatives			
Continue to engage in or obtain research on visitors	● (red)		

Additional Pillar Action Steps:

- Work with government leaders in the Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads regions as well as VDOT on a concerted basis to contribute to traffic congestion solutions, which may have a direct effect on visitation to the Chesapeake Bay region as the region attempts to draw cross-visitation from Washington D.C., including international visitors, and the Hampton Roads region
- Initiate a cohesive effort among counties in the region and VDOT to enhance road signage and wayfinding to increase awareness of the waterfront and waterfront towns. This may include additional signage which references waterfront points of interest. Explore creative sign installations which may draw attention to water and other visitor themes, such as history and outdoors, to enhance wayfinding and sense of place.
- Ensure wayfinding information is readily available to draw visitors from the Washington D.C. area and the Hampton Roads region, particularly the Historic Triangle area, which is proximate to the region

Partnerships

Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Tourism Organizations Objective: Organizations to lead tourism initiatives are strengthened or formed			
Create and strengthen tourism organizations	🔴		
Government Objective: Collaboration among government organizations at the local, state, and federal levels for tourism initiatives is improved			
Increase communication, planning, and coordination among government entities	🔴		
Connectivity Objective: Connectivity among tourism attractions, businesses, and destinations is improved through partnering			
Develop and enhance communication and partnering among Virginia tourism industry stakeholders	🔴	Increase coordination and collaboration among stakeholders that share interests in tourism assets outside of Virginia	🟣

Additional Partnership Action Steps:

- Build the capacity of the DMOs of the region with tourism professionals dedicated to tourism marketing and development, including the Northern Neck Tourism Commission as a regional organization responsible for tourism in the northern portion of the Chesapeake Bay region
- Consider the reorganization of the Middle Peninsula Tourism Group and encourage working in conjunction with Northern Neck Tourism Commission

- Explore opportunities to partner or join the Coastal Virginia Tourism Alliance for synergistic opportunities with the other coastal areas of Virginia
- Enhance collaboration and communication among government leaders in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula in support of tourism and economic development initiatives
- Seek opportunities to partner among hoteliers (including B&Bs), restaurant owners, and tourism businesses (guides, aqua-tourism, wineries, artisans, etc.) for cross-promotional discounts and packages

Promotions

Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Government, Business & Resident Objective: Efforts to promote and educate government leaders, the business community, and residents on tourism initiatives and benefits are continued			
Communicate and inform local and state government officials on tourism benefits and initiatives	🔴	Communicate and inform tourism industry stakeholders, including partners, the business community, and residents on tourism initiatives and benefits	🔴
Economic Development Objective: Tourism promotion efforts for economic development are enhanced			
Enhance promotion of Virginia to potential tourism investors, businesses, and developers to generate economic development	🟣		
Connectivity Objective: Virginia is positioned based on the lures of tourism assets with a strategy to improve connectivity among destinations, attractions, and visitor themes			
Enhance and create visitor itineraries and packages	🔴	Enhance and develop themed trails	🟣
High Impact Markets Objective: Visitor markets with high impact continue to be targeted, while new markets are explored			
Continue to identify and evaluate key geographic and thematic target markets for promotions	🔴		

Additional Promotion Action Steps:

- Develop communication plans for government officials, tourism stakeholders, businesses, and residents and continue to educate and inform officials on tourism benefits (qualitative and quantitative based on research) as well as ongoing initiatives for economic development through various means
- Identify and engage key opinion leaders in the region, which may help to serve as ambassadors for the tourism industry and aid in the education and promotion of tourism to government leaders, funding efforts, and development initiatives

- Seek opportunities to partner among hoteliers (including B&Bs), restaurant owners, and tourism businesses (guides, aqua-tourism, wineries, artisans, etc.) for cross-promotional discounts and packages
- Continue to target high-value geographic markets, including but not limited to Washington D.C. with its international visitors given its proximity to the region
- Continue promotional efforts in key thematic markets for the Chesapeake Bay region, including culinary, history/heritage, and outdoors

Policies

Strategy	Priority/Timing	Strategy	Priority/Timing
Funding Objective: Funding is available for tourism growth			
Enforce policy for use of tourism tax revenues collected by localities	🔴	Create sustainable funding policies for tourism marketing and development for communities	🔴
Tourism Policies and Programs for Assistance Objective: Tourism policies and programs which provide assistance for growth and development are enhanced			
Continue and enhance programs which support tourism marketing	🟣	Continue to evaluate policies which encourage an attractive tourism business environment	🟣
Continue and explore improvements for programs which support tourism product development	🔴	Educate public and private sector stakeholders on legislative policies and programs impacting tourism	🟣
Explore establishment of assistance program for tourism businesses	🟣		
Tourism Policy for Government Objective: Policy for government cooperation is created to assist and support the tourism industry			
Establish policy for cooperative guidelines and arrangements for cohesive government approach to the tourism industry	🟣		
Preservation Objective: Policies and programs designed to preserve historical, cultural, and natural assets are maintained			
Uphold policies and programs which promote sustainability and preservation of historical, cultural, and environmental assets	🟣		

Additional Policies Action Steps:

- Explore the development of a tourism council at the community level in localities where policy enforcement is recognized as an issue. The council should be comprised of public and private stakeholders that are responsible for overseeing the use of tourism tax revenue in the community.
- Identify local liaisons or advocates which can work to address policies and programs, including the creation of Tourism Zones, and national grant and assistance programs
- Continue to explore alternative creative funding solutions to achieve community solutions and work with local governments, where appropriate, to secure dedicated funding that could be reinvested for tourism marketing and development purposes.

Garnering widespread support from tourism stakeholders and an advocacy effort of the industry will be important in influencing government leaders. For tourism development, the formation of a tourism development fund at local level could be explored.

- Continue to evaluate business policies, ordinances, codes, etc. at the local level that may impact visitation and tourism business growth. Local policies and their enforcement may vary throughout the state, and it is critical for local stakeholders to collaborate on efforts to create or amend policies which will positively impact tourism.
- Explore the development of tourism business assistance programs, such as incubators, through local governments, small business

administrations, and economic development departments, as appropriate, to seek support and assistance for tourism businesses

- Continue to engage in preservation and sustainability efforts at the local level, regarding historical, cultural, and environmental assets, including seeking Virginia Green Certifications and LEED certifications for new development

Key Stakeholders

The below list of regional and universal stakeholders illustrates the types of stakeholder groups that may be involved in implementing the State Tourism Plan and the region's strategies and action steps. The lists are comprehensive, but not necessaily exhaustive. In addition, regional stakeholders include local and regional government offices, economic development offices and planning district commissions. The list of regional stakeholders highlights organizations specific to the Chesapeake Bay, including those organizations identified as having tourism marketing representatives, while universal stakeholders includes a broader list comprised of key organization types, statewide organizations, state government entities, and federal organizations.

Regional

- Colonial Beach Artists' Guild
- Colonial Beach Chamber of Commerce
- Colonial Beach Tourism Committee
- County of Lancaster
- Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism
- King George Chamber of Commerce

- King George County Parks, Recreation & Tourism
- Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce
- Mathews County Visitor & Information Center
- Northern Neck Tourism Commission
- Northern Neck Planning District Commission

- Northumberland County Chamber of Commerce
- Richmond County
- Town of Colonial Beach
- Town of Kilmarnock
- Westmoreland Tourism Council

Universal

- Art/Music Programs
- Artisan Center of Virginia
- Attraction Management
- Chambers of Commerce
- Colleges (including community)/Universities
- Council on Virginia's Future
- Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Department of Business Assistance
- Department of Conservation & Recreation
- Department of Environmental Quality
- Department of Forestry
- Department of Gaming & Inland Fisheries
- Department of Historic Resources

- Department of Housing & Community Development
- Department of Rail and Public Transportation
- Department of Transportation
- Destination Marketing Organizations
- Downtown Development Associations
- Educational Institutions
- Environmental Organizations
- History Foundations/Non-Profit Organizations
- Horse Breed Associations
- Hospitality Associations
- Keep Virginia Beautiful
- Local Arts Organizations

- Local Downtown Development Associations
- Local Government (City/Town/County)
- Military Associations
- National Park Service
- National Refuge Service
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Non-Profit Arts & Music Organizations
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Planning District Commissions
- Preservation Virginia
- Private Businesses
- Sports Associations
- State Government Departments
- State Legislators
- Urban Forest Council

- Virginia Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus
- Virginia Business Incubation Association
- Virginia Chamber of Commerce
- Virginia Commission for the Arts
- Virginia Community Development Corporation
- Virginia Downtown Development Association
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- Virginia Farm Bureau
- Virginia General Assembly
- Virginia Green
- Virginia Historical Society
- Virginia Horse Shows Association
- Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association
- Virginia Marine Resources Commission
- Virginia Music Associations
- Virginia Tech Community Design Assistance Center
- Virginia Tourism Corporation
- Virginia Wine Board
- Virginia Wine Marketing Office

Regional Strategy Takeaways

It is the combination of the tourism products which create a destination, and as such, these combined strategies are meant to build the Chesapeake Bay region as a destination in a sustainable manner and maintain the character and authenticity of the region. The strategies outlined are intended to build upon the Chesapeake Bay's core strengths, enhance visitor experiences, and ultimately enable the region to increase tourism. When unique and genuine tourism experiences are connected or clustered in offering, destination appeal and strength is increased, allowing the region to compete more effectively against other destinations. The Chesapeake Bay region has the opportunity to do just this by growing its tourism asset base and connecting visitor experiences to increase tourism and enhance competitiveness.

Chesapeake Bay has the opportunity to greater leverage its natural and historic assets in the region as well as its proximity to the Washington D.C. area. With improved water access, the region's coastlines provide the opportunity for waterfront recreation to serve as a primary draw for the area. Inland areas and parks also offer additional natural sightseeing, wildlife, and recreation activities. The region's natural assets also extend the basis of culinary travel for aqua-tourism, agri-tourism, wineries, and dining featuring local oysters, crab, and fish as well as farm-to-table experiences. The deep historical roots of Colonial history and presidential birthplaces, charming small towns, emerging arts, and authentic watermen and farming heritage offer further depth to the visitor experience. The region's assets of national significance help distinguish it when combined with the natural landscape and watermen and farming culture. The region's unique integration of these assets and experiences will help to set the Chesapeake Bay apart from other destinations, where the re-emergence of the aquaculture in the region may present an opportunity for further distinction, building on its natural assets and watermen heritage.

High-Level Regional Takeaways:

- Leverage history/heritage and outdoors as unifying themes for the region, further developing active water-based outdoor experiences and accessibility for scenic getaways and outdoor enthusiasts
- Enhance water accessibility
- Utilize geographic proximity to the Washington D.C. area
- Develop tourism anchors and signature experiences for the region, including those to extend visitor seasons
- Cluster product development and connect attractions and destinations for concentrated experiences, including outdoors, culinary, and history/heritage experiences
- Maintain character and authenticity with watermen heritage as well as Colonial history and create new development in a sustainable manner
- Improve destination infrastructure for visitors, including accommodations and tourism support businesses
- Build recognition of tourism assets
- Enhance economic base
- Enhance collaboration for tourism development and marketing within the region